

VĀLMĪKI: HIS AUTHORSHIP, DATE AND PERSONALITY  
AS GLEANED FROM INDOCHINESE SOURCES

It has been suggested that the South East Asian versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa* or at least many episodes of these versions owe their origin to one or the other non-Valmikian sources<sup>1</sup>. Yet Vālmīki remains at the roots of the Indochinese versions prevalent in Cambodia, Thailand, Laos, Vietnam. His work in its original text and his personality began to influence Cambodia and Champa (South Vietnam) from the early centuries of the Christian era. In the middle of the 5th century A.D., a *brāhmaṇa* named Somaśarman lived at Bhavapura in Cambodia. He was married to the sister of Bhavavarman, the ruling king of Cambodia. He was a *sāmavedin*, well-versed in the musical recitation of the Sanskrit texts. He installed the images of Tribhuvaneśvara and the Sun, made arrangements for their worship, providing for liberal fees. To substantiate his personal taste for recitation of texts, he offered to the temple of Tribhuvaneśvara copies (*pustakam*) of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the whole *Mahābhārata* and the *Purāṇas* for their daily unbroken recitation:

---

1. The source of the Old-Javanese *Rāmāyaṇa*; for example, is not Vālmīki, but the *Bhaṭṭi Kāvya* or the *Rāvaṇavadha* of Bhaṭṭi (6-7th century A.D.).

Cf. MANMOHAN GHOSH, "On the sources of the old-Javanese *Rāmāyaṇa Kakawin*", JGIS 3,1 (1936), p. 113 ff. The bas-relief at Prambanan and Panataran differ both from Vālmīki and Bhaṭṭi, V. RAGHAVAN, *The Rāmāyaṇa in Greater India*, Surat, 1975, p. 91.

Cf. F. MARTINI, "En marge du *Rāmāyaṇa* Cambodgien", JA 238, i, (1950), pp. 81-90 for non Valmikian elements in the Cambodian Rāma legend.

*dvijendur ākṛti svāmī sāmavedavidagraṇīḥ  
 śrī somaśarmārkayutaṃ sa tribhuvaneśvaram  
 atiṣṭhipan mahāpūjām atipuṣkala dakṣiṇam  
 rāmāyaṇa purāṇābhyām aśeṣam bhārataṃ dadat  
 akṛtānvaham acchedyām sa ca tad vācanāsthitim  
 hatas tu hartā durbuddhir ya ekam api pustakam<sup>2</sup>*

The Tra-Kieu inscription of King Prakāśadharma of Champa (C. 653-679 A.D.) describes the main traits of the personality of Vālmīki<sup>3</sup>:

*yasya śokāt samutpannam ślokaṃ brahmābhipūja (ti)  
 viṣṇoḥ puṃsupurāṇasya mānuṣasyātmārūpiṇaḥ  
 ..... ṛtaṃ kṛtyaṃ kṛtaṃ yenābhiṣecanam  
 kaverādyasya maharṣer vālmīkeḥ śru ..... rih  
 pūjāsthānaṃ punas tasya kṛta .....  
 prakāśadharma nṛpatiḥ sarvāriganasūdanaḥ  
 vidyāśaktikṣamā lakṣmī kīrti dhairya (guṇānvithaḥ)  
 ..... tyeṣa jagatkāntaḥ śārade antarīte ripau*

This description corresponds to what Indian sources tell us about Vālmīki. In the *phalaśruti* of the *Yuddhakāṇḍa*, Vālmīki is described as the author of the first poem (*ādikāvya*)<sup>4</sup>. Kalidāsa acknowledges Vālmīki as the (first) poet in his *Raghuvamśam*.<sup>5</sup> By the time various *parvas* of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Bālakaṇḍa* of the *Rāmāyaṇa* took their final shape, the first poet (*ādi kāvi*) and the sage Vālmīki were

2. R.C. MAJUMDAR, *Inscriptions of Kambujadeśa*, Calcutta, 1953, no. 13.

3. P. MUS, "Études indiennes et indochinoises - I. L'inscription à Vālmīki de Prakāśadharma (Trà-Kiêu)", BEFEO 28, pp. 147-148.

4. *The Rāmāyaṇa, Yuddhakāṇḍa*, Critical Edition, vol. VI, ed. by P.L. Vaidya, 1971. Cf. additional passage no 3703 p. 878.

*dhanyaṃ yaśasyam āyusyaṃ rājñāṃ ca vijayāvaham  
 ādikāvyaṃ idaṃ tv ārṣaṃ purā vālmīkinā kṛtam  
 yaḥ śṛṇoti sadā loke naraḥ pāpāt pramucyate  
 putrakāmaśca putrānvai dhanakāmo dhanāni ca  
 labhate manuḥ loke śrutvā rāmābhiṣecanam*

5. *The Raghuvamśam* 15, 41.  
*sa pṛṣṭhaḥ sarvato vārtam ākhyad rājñe na santatim  
 pratyarpayīsyataḥ kāle kaver ādyasya śāsanāt*

considered to be identical<sup>6</sup>. The inscription of Champa presents Vālmiki as the (first) poet and the great sage.

In the beginning of the *Bālakāṇḍa* (*sarga* II), the genesis of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, and the circumstances which led to the composition of the first poem are described. Vālmiki heard the resumé of Rāma's life from Nārada, went to the bank of Tamasā, near the Ganges to take bath and saw the male of *krauñca* pair struck down by a Niṣāda hunter. Overwhelmed with compassion and hearing the *krauñca* hen wailing, Vālmiki uttered this curse: «Since, Niṣāda, you killed one of this pair of *krauñca*, distracted at the height of the passion, you shall not live for long» (1.2.14).

«Fixed in metrical quarters, each with a like number of syllables, and fit for the accompaniment of stringed and percussion instruments, the utterance that I produced in this access of *śoka*, grief shall be called *śloka*, poetry and nothing else» (1.2.17).

«The *śloka*, grief that the great seer sang out in four metrical quarters, all equal in syllables, has by virtue of its being repeated after him, became *śloka*, poetry» (1.2.39).

Consequently Brahmā visits Vālmiki and commissions him to compose the poem:

«It was by my will alone that you produced this elegant speech» (1.2.30). «You must tell the world the story of the righteous, virtuous, wise and steadfast Rāma, just as you heard it from Nārada .....» (1.2.31-33).

«No utterance of yours in this poem shall be false. Now compose the holy story of Rāma fashioned into *śloka* to delight the heart» (1.2.34).

«As long as the mountains and rivers shall endure upon the earth, so long will the story of *Rāmāyaṇa* will be told among men» (1.2.35).

This part of *sarga* II of the *Bālakāṇḍa*, establishing causal relationship between grief (*śoka*) and poetry (*śloka*), and describing the praise that Brahmā bestowed upon Vālmiki's future poetical composition was master-minded and powerfully summarised by the author of Champa in only six Sanskrit words which could be translated as «the *śloka*, poetry generated by *śoka*, grief and praised by Brahmā».

6. CAMILLE BULCKE, *Rāmakathā, utpatti aura vikasa*, Prayāga Viśvavidyālaya, 1971, p. 33.

By the fifth century A.D. when the *Viṣṇudharmottara* was composed, Vālmīki was already considered as an incarnation of Viṣṇu. In a prophetic manner the text says that Viṣṇu will reincarnate as Vālmīki and compose the *Rāmāyaṇa* in the end of *Tretā Yuga* (1.74.38). In the *Vṛhaddharma purāṇa* (13th century A. D.), Satī the wife of Śiva bestows a boon upon Viṣṇu to enable him to compose the epic poem, incarnating himself as Vālmīki.

The *Viṣṇudharmottara* prescribes for the worship of Vālmīki:

*vidyākāmo atha vālmīki vyāsaṃ vāpyatha pūjayet*

The *Pratimālakṣaṇa* (III. 85.64) offers prescriptions for fashioning an image of Vālmīki:

*gauras tu kāryo vālmīkir jarāmaṇḍaladudarśaḥ  
tapasyābhirataḥ śānto na kṛśo na ca pīvarah*

These Sanskrit texts provide the Indian context for the installation of an image of Vālmīki in a temple and the upgradation of the poet to the rank of an incarnation of Viṣṇu in Champa as recorded in the Tra-kieu inscription<sup>7</sup>.

V. Raghavan finds out a reference to Kubera with his epithet of Ekāṣaṇḍa in the Myson Pedestal inscription of Champa. The *Uttarakāṇḍa* 13.24.31 explains that one of Kubera's eyes became burnt, since he stared at Pārvatī, his friend's wife, so the god earned this epithet.

On the basis of the Tra-kieu inscription and the Myson Pedestal inscription Raghavan concludes: «These inscriptions and the currency of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in Champa, with *Bāla-* and *Uttarakāṇḍa* in the 7th century A.D. are important in the context of the doubt cast on these *kāṇḍas* and their antiquity by some scholars»<sup>8</sup>.

It would be hazardous to prove the currency of *Uttarakāṇḍa* in Champa in the 7th century on the basis of a stray reference to the epithet of Kubera. The Tra-kieu inscription shows its familiarity with

7. CAMILLE BULCKE, *Rāmakathā* cit., pp. 43-44.

8. V. RAGHAVAN, *The Rāmāyaṇa in Greater India* cit., p. 42.

the legend of the creation of poetry by Vālmīki as contained in the *sarga* II of the *Bālakāṇḍa*. But this does not mean that the *Bālakāṇḍa* in its present form was entirely known to the author of Champa. Even if the text of *Bālakāṇḍa* was known in Champa in the 7th century A.D., it cannot be treated as contemporary to the five *kāṇḍas* (II-VI) on this basis.

The Tra-kieu inscription of Champa reflects a later stage in the development of the epic, when Vālmīki was not only the first poet (*ādi kāvi*), but also an incarnation of Viṣṇu for whom a temple, an image and a special cult was provided. Since the text of the *Rāmāyaṇa* (*pustakam*) was available in Cambodia in the fifth century A.D., and Vālmīki was receiving a regular cult in a temple in Champa in the seventh century A.D., it would be safe to conclude that by the early centuries of the Christian Era, the pandits who accompanied the Indian merchants had already arrived with the full length manuscripts of the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*. These manuscripts must have represented different recensions of the *Rāmāyaṇa* as almost all major port cities in various parts of India were active in trade relations with Indochina at one or the other stage of the recorded history.

In 1970 the *Phra Lak Phra Lam* or the *Rāma Jātaka* was popular in Laos before the imposition of the Communist rule, and was recited at Buddhist monasteries during the rainy season through out the kingdom. Thematically, this text can be divided into two parts, the first part deals with nān Cāndā (Śāntā), the daughter of Daśaratha and the elder sister of Rāma and the second part with Sītā, the wife of Rāma. The legend of Śāntā has been chosen by the author to describe the world-view of Laotian people. The author recreates the geneology of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. In his scheme, Parameśvara has two sons: Daṭṭaḥṛtthaḥ (Daśaratha) and Viṛulhaḥ.

Viṛulhaḥ, the younger son succeeds his father to the throne of Indraprasthanagara (Angkor). Dissatisfied, the elder brother founds a new kingdom for himself at Vientiane (Laos). Viṛulhaḥ, the king of Indraprasthanagara has three sons: Rāvaṇa, Vibhīṣaṇa and Indrajita. Daśaratha has a daughter Cāndā (Śāntā) followed by twin sons Lāk and Lām (Lakṣmaṇa and Rāma). At the age of three, Rāvaṇa flies to Vientiane, abducts Śāntā, the daughter of his uncle Daśaratha, and takes her as his wife.

Taking Śāntā as his wife Rāvaṇa contravenes the established Lao customs in two ways: firstly he violates the taboo against the marriage with an elder cousin and secondly he does not ask for Śāntā's hand in the traditional way, which is by presentig a bride-price after a formal negotiation. As it is clear from long description of Śāntā's episode running over 481 printed pages in Lao language, edited by the author of this paper, the Lao society can pardon the first fault committed by Rāvaṇa, but it cannot forgive the second. Rāvaṇa is defeated at the hands of Rāma in the battles which they fight along the Mekong Valley; vanquished, he visits the court of Vientiane, formally begs for the hand of Śāntā from his uncle Daśaratha after paying customary Laotian bride-price. Sītā, born to the couple Rāvaṇa-Śāntā, provides the theme for an equally lengthy description of the battle of Laṅkā in the second part of the story<sup>9</sup>. In Laotian story, the theme of abduction is duplicated. One relates to the abduction of Śāntā, the elder sister of Rāma and the other concerns the abduction of Sītā, the wife of Rāma. The author of both these acts of abduction is Rāvaṇa.

In the southern recensions of the *Rāmāyaṇa* of Vālmīki, Śāntā is the daughter of Romapād, the king of Aṅga. Romapād gave his daughter to the sage Ṛṣyaṣṅga. Daśaratha, king of Kośala, is an intimate friend of Romapād. He invites his friend's son-in-law, the sage Ṛṣyaṣṅga and Śāntā to Ayodhyā. The sage performs the sacrifice to procure sons for issueless Daśaratha.

Considerable research has been done to explain the linguistic and textual webs in which Śāntā was caught and finally transformed into the daughter of Daśaratha in the Gaudīya and north-western recensions of the *Rāmāyaṇa* of Vālmīki<sup>10</sup>.

It can be argued that the Laotian text which, in its present form, dates back to the beginning of the 18th century, borrows the legend of Śāntā from one of the later vernacular versions of India or from the oral tradition. However, it cannot be ruled out that one of the recensions of the work of Vālmīki himself was the ultimate source of this

---

9. SACHCHIDANAND SAHAI (ed.), *For the Phra Lak Phra Lam or the Phra Lam Sadok*, Part I-II, Vientiane, 1973. For the English translation and a critical study of this text cf. Sachchidanand Sahai, *The Rāmājātaka in Laos: A Study in the Phra Lak Phra Lam*, vol. I-II + 4 maps, New Delhi, D.K. Publishers, 1996.

10. CAMILLE BULCKE, *Rāmakathā* cit., pp. 281-92.

Laotian legend.

Vālmiki was respected at the South East Asian Royal courts not only in the fifth or seventh century, he exercised his influence till very recent years. On the 26th September 1972, His Majesty Sri Savang Vatthana, the last king of Laos granted me an audience and led me through his throne hall to show me the walls of the palace covered with the scenes of the *Rāmāyaṇa* executed on the coloured glass. He explained to me that on one side of the wall the story was depicted according to the *Phra Lak Phra Lam* and on the other side according to Vālmiki. The late king felt proud of his intimate knowledge of Vālmiki's work.

At that time, I was busy in editing the text of the *Phra Lak Phra Lam*. So I could not investigate about recensions of Vālmiki which inspired the execution of *Rāmāyaṇa* scenes on the glass panels in the Royal palace at Luang Prabang. Of late the palace has been turned into a museum, and it would be rewarding to examine these panels.

The episode of buffalo Dvōraḥbī (Dundubhī) is another link which takes the Laotian version of the *Phra Lak Phra Lam* to its Valmikian roots. First, the buffalo went to a *devaputra* who lived on an anthill and challenged him for a duel.

Then the guardian deity of anthill said: «O Dvōraḥbī, you who are guilty of patricide! Why should I fight with you, letting your sin contaminate me? You must go to fight with someone else».

Upon hearing this, the buffalo was very angry, he leapt forward, battered the anthill which was the dwelling-place of the deity and reduced it to the state of crushed limestone.

Upon seeing this the deity cursed the buffalo saying: «O evil beast! I must live my life. You should live your own life. Why have you come to harm me? If you boast that you are very skilled, you should go to fight with the deity who guards the *bo jai* tree. May that deity sever your head (from your body) with a sharp sword, or an axe or arbalest or a gun, causing you to die this day».

When Dvōraḥbī heard the deity saying this, he wanted very much to fight. He went like a whirlwind and reached the deity who guarded the *bo jai* tree. He said: «O deity, you who have no magical knowledge! If you are so proud of your skill, you should come to fight me in order to remove your drowsiness».

Then the deity who guarded the *bo jai* tree said: «O evil beast guilty of patricide! Why should I fight with you, allowing your sin to contaminate me?».

Dvórahbī leapt forward to attack the tree with his horns, reducing it to dust. When the deity saw Dvórahbī thus destroying his abode, he was very angry and cursed him saying: «O evil beast! May tiger devour your head! If you boast that you are really very skilled, you should go to fight with the deity who guards a cave over yonder in the east. You will certainly lose your life at the hand of that deity».

Desirous to fight, the buffalo went like a whirlwind to the deity who guarded the cave, and said to him: «My lord! I want to combat you. Come and fight with me to remove your drowsiness».

Then the deity said: «O evil beast! You are guilty of patricide. Why should I fight with you, allowing your sin to contaminate me?».

When the guardian deity of the cave saw the buffalo destroying his abode, he was very angry. He said: «O evil beast! If you boast that you are really very skilled, you should go to fight with the deity who guards the seashore».

When Dvórahbī heard the guardian deity of the cave saying these words, he went like a whirlwind and quickly reached the seashore: «My lord *devahtā*! I strongly desire to combat you. I beg you, come and fight with me to remove your drowsiness».

Then the deity who guarded the seashore said: «O evil beast, you who are guilty of patricide! Why should I fight with you, allowing your sin to contaminate me».

When the deity had spoken thus, the buffalo was very angry, he bounded forward and attacked the seashore with his horns. Then the guardian deity of the seashore became very angry. He cursed (the buffalo) saying: «O evil beast! If you boast that you are really very skilled, you should go to fight with Sāṅgīp and brah Lican who live on an island in the middle of the ocean to the south. You should go to fight with the two princes so that they may chop off your head»<sup>11</sup>.

It is evident from the passage cited above that the *Phra Lak Phra Lam* has preserved the Valmikian structure of the dialogue between

---

11. The *Phra Lak Phra Lam*, (ed. Sachchidanand Sahai), Part II, pp. 210-12.



Dundubhī and those whom he challenges for a duel. The guardian deities of (1) an anthill, (2) the *bo jai* tree, (3) a cave, and of (4) the sea-shore face the challenge before Dundubhī goes to Sugrīva and Vālin. In the *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa*, Dundubhī challenges the Ocean who directs him to Himavān. The latter directs him to Vālin<sup>12</sup>.

12. The *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa* (Critical Edition), Vol. IV, the *Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa*,  
Sarga 11

mahiṣo dundubhir nāma Kailāsaśikharaprabhaḥ  
balaṇi nāgasahasrasya dhārayāmāsa vīryavān//7//  
vīryotsekena duṣṭātmā varadānāc ca mohitaḥ  
jagāma sa mahākāyaḥ samudraṇi saritāṇi patim//8//  
ūrminantam atikramya sāgaraṇi ratna saṃcayam  
mama yuddhaṇi prayaccheti tam uvāca mahārṇavam//9//  
tataḥ samudro dharmātmā samutthāya mahābalaḥ  
abravīd vacanaṇi rājann asuraṇi kālacoditam//10//  
samartho nāsmi te dātum yuddhaṇi yuddhaviśārada  
śrūyatām abhidhāsyāmi yas te yuddhaṇi pradāsyati//11//  
śailarājo mahāraṇye tapasvi śaraṇaṇi param  
śaṅkaraśvasuro nāmnā himavān iti viśrutaḥ//12//  
guhā prasravaṇopeto bahukandaranirjharāḥ  
sa samarthastava prītim atulāṇi kartum āhave//13//  
taṇi bhītam iti vijñāya samudram asurottamaḥ  
himavad vanam āgacch charaś cāpad ivā cyutaḥ//14//  
tatas tasya gireḥ śvetā gajendra vipulāḥ silāḥ  
cikṣepa bahudhā bhumau dundubhir vinanāda ca//15//  
tataḥ śvetāmbudākāraḥ saumyaḥ prītikarākṛtiḥ  
himavān abravīd vākyāṇi sva eva śikhare sthitaḥ//16//  
kleṣṭum arhasi māṇi na tvaṇi dundubhe dharmavatsala  
raṇakarmasv akuśalas tapasvi śaraṇaṇi hy aham//17//  
tasya tad vacanaṇi śrutvā girirājasya dhīmataḥ  
uvāca dundubhir vākyāṇi krodhāt saṇiraktalocanaḥ//18//  
yadi yuddhe 'samarthas tvaṇi madbhayād vā nirudyamaḥ  
tam ācakṣva pradadhyān me yo adya yuddhaṇi yuyutsataḥ//19//  
himavān abravīd vākyāṇi śrutvā vākyaviśāradaḥ  
anuktapūrvaṇi dharmātmā krodhāt tam asurottamam//20//  
vālī nāma mahāprājñaḥ śakratulya parākramaḥ  
adhyāste vānaraḥ śrīmān kiṣkindhām atulaprabhām//21//